



## TOBACCO USE HEALTH RISKS AMONG RHODE ISLAND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

*December 1999*

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*Rhode Island Department of Education  
in collaboration with the  
Rhode Island Department of Health*

This summary highlights selected information on tobacco use behaviors which affect health risks among Rhode Island high school students, based on results of Rhode Island's 1997 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The YRBS is an anonymous and voluntary survey conducted in alternate years among randomly selected samples of high school students in each of 46 participating states and territories nationwide. It was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor health-risk behaviors that contribute to the major causes of mortality, disease, injury and other health and social problems among youth and adults in the United States.

During the spring of 1997 the 84-item multiple choice YRBS was administered to 1,528 randomly selected Rhode Island public school students in grades 9 through 12. With a response rate of 60.0%, results of the survey can be considered representative of all Rhode Island public school students in grades 9 through 12.

***For additional information or a more detailed report contact Cynthia Corbridge, RI Department of Education (401) 222-4600 ext. 2106 or Jana Hesser, Ph.D., Office of Health Statistics, RI Department of Health (401) 222-2550.***

### **K** *KEY FINDINGS*

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- ✓ Tobacco use is considered the chief preventable cause of death in the United States, accounting for more than one of every five deaths. 35% of both male and female Rhode Island teens reporting smoking cigarettes in the prior month, and are considered to be "current smokers." Nationally 36% of teens are current smokers.
- ✓ 60% of current Rhode Island teen smokers reported trying to quit smoking in the past. Female smokers (66%) were more likely than male smokers (54%) to report trying to quit.
- ✓ One-half of all smokers begin smoking before the age of 15. 24% of Rhode Island teens indicated they smoked a cigarette for the first time before age 13.
- ✓ Though 30% of current Rhode Island teen smokers reported they usually obtained their cigarettes through direct purchase from a store, 21% reported they usually had someone else purchase cigarettes for them, and 30% obtained cigarettes by borrowing them.
- ✓ 59% of Rhode Island's current teen smokers under the age of 18 reported they were never asked to show proof of age when purchasing cigarettes in a store during the past month. It is illegal in Rhode Island to sell cigarettes to persons under the age of 18.
- ✓ 10% of males reporting using chewing tobacco or snuff on one or more of the 30 days preceding the survey, compared with 2% of females. The rates for smokeless tobacco use in Rhode Island (6%) was less than half the national rate (15%).

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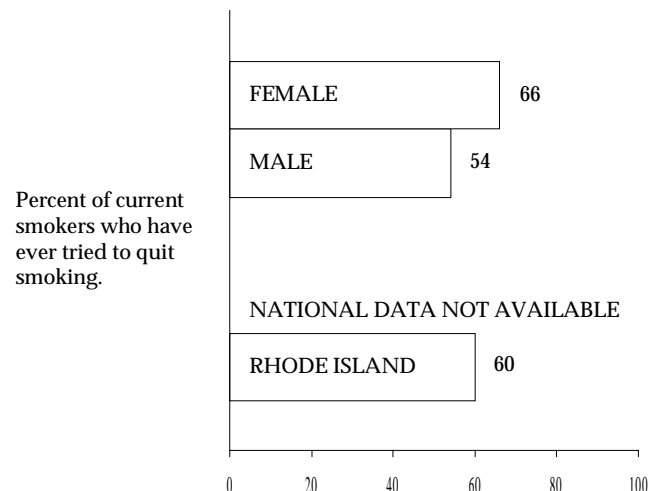
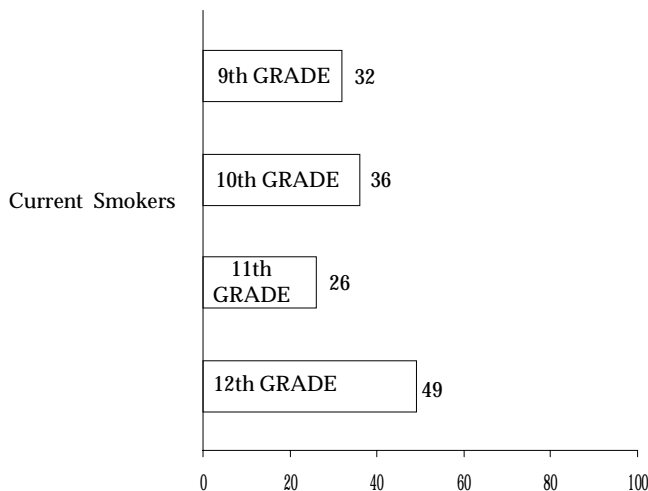
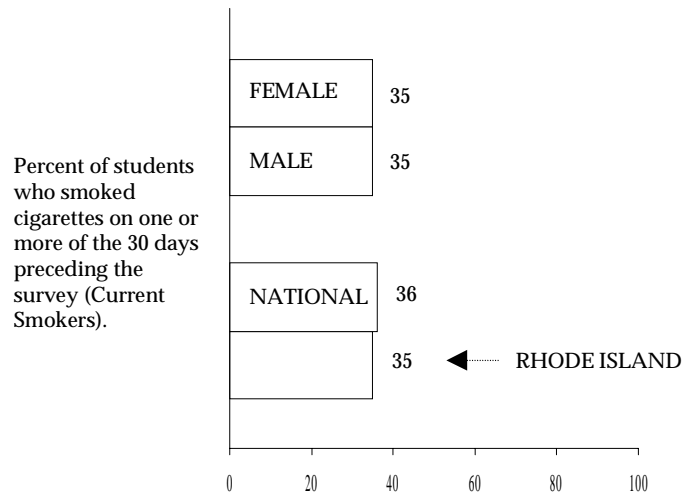
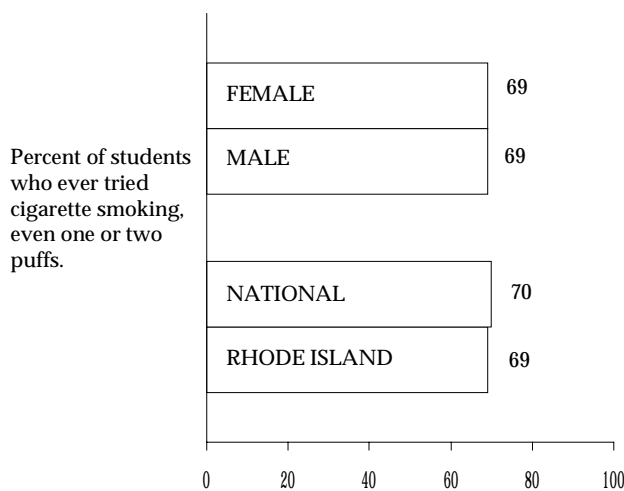
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# Tobacco Use

## **Risk Behavior:** Cigarette smoking

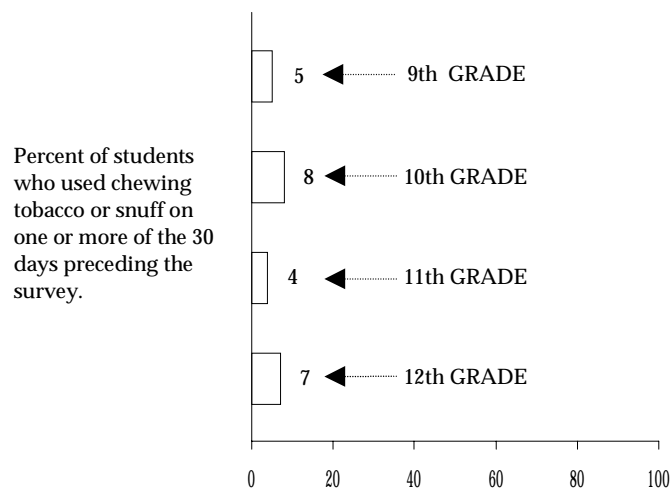
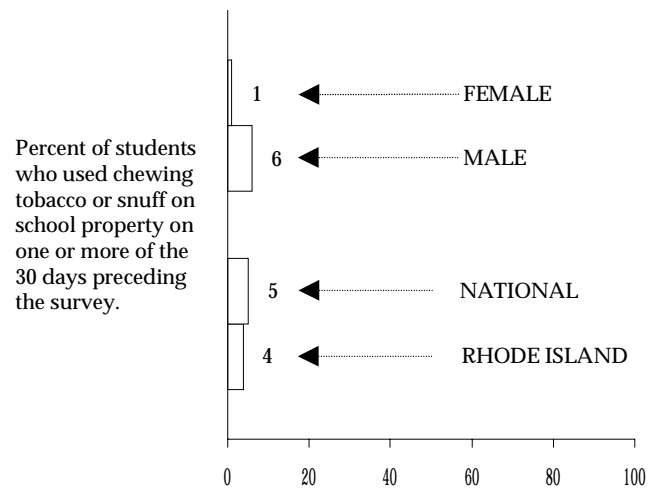
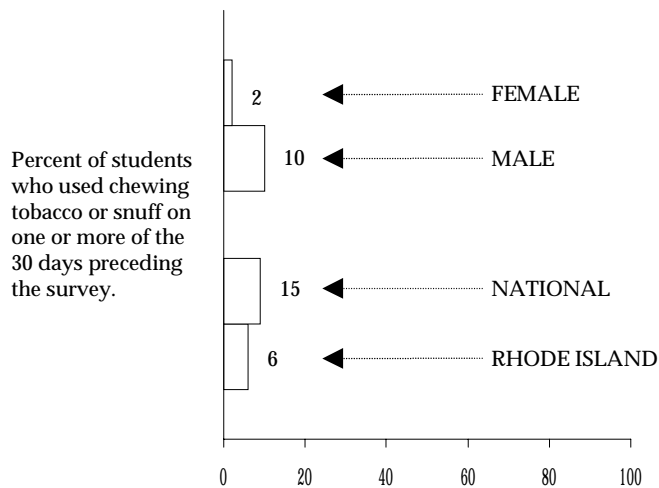
**Rationale:** Tobacco use is considered the chief preventable cause of death in the United States, accounting for more than one of every five deaths. Smoking causes heart disease; cancers of the lung, larynx, mouth, esophagus, and bladder; stroke; and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. If 29% of the 70 million children now living in the United States smoke cigarettes as adults, then at least 5 million of them will die of smoking-related diseases. In addition, smoking is related to poor academic performance and the use of alcohol and other drugs. Teens who smoke are three times more likely than nonsmokers to use alcohol, eight times more likely to use marijuana, and 22 times more likely to use cocaine. Smoking is associated with other risky behaviors, such as fighting and engaging in unprotected sex. Over one million teenagers begin smoking each year.



# Tobacco Use

## **Risk Behavior:** Smokeless tobacco use

**Rationale:** Oral cancer occurs more frequently among smokeless tobacco users than nonusers and may be 50 times as frequent among long-term snuff users. Smokeless tobacco can lead to the development of oral leukoplakia and gingival recession and can cause addiction to nicotine. Between 1970 and 1986, the prevalence of snuff use increased 15 times and chewing tobacco use increased four times among men aged 17 - 19.



# Tobacco Use

**Risk Behavior:** Age of initiation, access to tobacco products, and use on school property

**Rationale:** One-half of all smokers begin smoking before the age of 15. It is estimated that about 3,500 Rhode Island children begin smoking every day. A survey in several Rhode Island communities in September, 1994, by local police showed children were able to purchase cigarettes from vending machines 87% of the time and were able to make unchallenged over-the-counter purchases from retailers 53% of the time. Children aged 12 to 17 in Rhode Island smoke more than 4.8 million packs of cigarettes annually for annual illegal sales in excess of 11.2 million dollars (American Cancer Society, Rhode Island Tobacco Fact Sheet).

